

# THE FLIP SIDE OF TURKEY FOOT ROCK

by

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**Abstract.** *The complicated history of Lucas County's Turkey Foot Rock is reviewed, and it is shown that some time between 1931 and its last move in 1953, from beside old Route 24 along the Maumee River to its present location adjacent to the Fallen Timbers monument, the rock was turned upside down from its original position and remains so today.*

## Introduction

The trials and tribulations of Ohio's most-travelled portable petroglyph have been well-documented by Keller (1952) and more recently by Swauger (1984) and Jacobs (2003) but invite some additional comment. Swauger (1984: 138) suggested that the incised "turkey tracks" found on the Lucas County Turkey Foot Rock petroglyph are so faint as to be virtually unrecognizable, as is certainly the case with the petroglyphs on its nearest neighbor, the more famous Inscription Rock at Kelley's Island. Swauger "could distinguish only one track, that of a bird, and that only faintly and perhaps only because we knew it was supposed to be there." (Note that he does not write "because we knew where it was supposed to be.")

According to the tradition surrounding Turkey Foot Rock, it was while standing on this rock that Ottawa Chief Turkey Foot (variously Me-sa-sa or Mis-sis-sa-in-zit) tried to rally his retreating warriors at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, only to be shot dead by an American bullet. Subsequently, Indians are said to have visited the rock, carving the bird tracks and leaving gifts of tobacco in his memory. Certainly there was such an Ottawa chief although even this fact is dismissed by some accounts. Toledo MetroParks Historic Programs Specialist Janet Rozick cites G. Michael Pratt's research to discount the story as "nothing more than legend since the battle took place on the bluffs overlooking the river, rather than on the flood plains" (Rozick n.d.: 7). Because the incident allegedly occurred while the Indians were retreating, it might not seem critical for the rock to have been located in the thick of the battle in order for the legend to be true; however, Pratt's historical research (1995) and subsequent archaeological research (2003; see also Jacobs 2003) certainly indicate that the battle and ancillary Native American activity occurred considerably to the north and east of the present Fallen Timbers memorial and well away from the original site of Turkey Foot Rock at the foot of Presque Isle Hill. Perhaps the most unusual (and somewhat operatic) interpretation is that expressed on the NRHP nomination form for the Fallen Timbers memorial: "It was here, fable has it, that Chief Turkey Foot after being mortally wounded in battle ascribed [italics added] his signature [sic], the

symbol of the turkey's foot. It is more likely that a tourist placed the symbol on this rock during the time it was located on the banks of the Maumee" (Mendinghall 1975: 2). In any case, Toledo MetroParks' *Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* (available on their web site) regards it as a "sacred site" and affirms that "it is still used by some American Indian individuals and groups as a site for offerings." Anecdotal evidence of this is offered by Downes, who mentions that "Turkey Foot Rock is continuing to be a very active shrine. I am told that every year Indian visitors from many parts of America stop at the Rock to see this memorial of the battle of Fallen Timbers. Ever since that famous battle, no year has elapsed without many such visits" (Downes 1955: 49).

## Turkey Foot Rock Today

Prompted to visit the site by discovery of an early (pre-1901) photograph clearly showing at least five "cuspidiform" markings or bird tracks, I was curious to see if there were any traces of those which Swauger had not been able to discern. Swauger includes photographs of the front and back of the rock, as it now appears mounted at the Fallen Timbers State Memorial immediately south of U.S. Route 24 in Maumee, Ohio, but he does not show the side on which the carvings occur. Figures 1-5 show the rock as it appears today adjacent to the Fallen Timbers Memorial, monument, where it was moved in 1953 by the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society.

## Early Photographic History

The earliest known illustration of Turkey Foot Rock is a somewhat fanciful drawing dating to 1860 and appearing in Benson Lossing's *Pictorial Field-book of the War of 1812* (published 1868). For the most part Lossing's drawing (Figure 6) is greatly exaggerated with eight giant turkey tracks scattered over the top and front of the rock, but the form and position of the rock is generally similar to that shown in late 19th - early 20th C. photographs. Because all other sources indicate that the carvings were made with a metal knife or hatchet, Lossing's drawing in respect to the carvings can be dismissed as highly imaginative and inaccurate. The rail fence, the road, the Maumee River, and Presque Isle Hill are accurate details to be seen in Benjamin Lossing's 1860 drawing. The broad, gentle concavity shown on the side of the rock facing the viewer is another important detail although sometimes difficult to see in later photographs.

The earliest and best known photograph of Turkey Foot Rock (Figure 7) is said to date to 1880 and corroborates the general location as shown by Lossing, including

landmarks such as the rail snake fence and the adjacent road. More significantly, it shows that the rock is partially buried. The slight concavity shown in Lossing's drawing is difficult to discern, but a large protuberance with central depression is visible along the lower margin. This photograph is reproduced in Charles Van Tassel's *Book of Ohio* (1901). Van Tassel also reproduced a photograph of the rock showing the actual carvings on the south face of the rock (Figure 8). This view was later reprinted by Vietzen (1973:73) without acknowledgement. Swauger referred to Vietzen's photograph but was unaware of the original source or of its age. Besides depicting the actual carvings, this view is important in showing the diagonal bedding plane and the nature of its extension onto the side of the rock to the left. Also apparent is the fact that the rock is lying on undisturbed, grassy ground and is, in fact, still partly buried, proof that the photograph dates prior to 1899, when the stone was first moved.

My interest in Turkey Foot Rock was initially piqued by the fact that this old photograph showed no fewer than five carved tracks. While a recent visit to the Fallen Timbers memorial revealed that traces of at least three of these can still be seen, it was not possible to reconcile the shape of the rock with Van Tassel's photograph until I realized that the rock is now upside down! This surprising development is made patently obvious by comparing Figures 3, 5 and 8. Although the rounded, pillow-like layer of the rock shown in the upper left of Figure 8 is obscured by the bronze historical plaque and its mounting in Figures 3 and 5, conclusive proof is the fact that in Figure 8 the larger portion of the south face of the stone is below the diagonal bedding plane, while in Figures 3 and 5 it is above the bedding plane. A very similar view is shown on a postcard (Figure 9) that probably dates to the period 1905-1915 but certainly later than the Van Tassel photograph. Very significant differences include the fact that the rock is now oriented with the long axis parallel to the road and the Maumee River; that is, the "south" face is now facing more-or-less west. Also, substantially more of the rock is exposed.

Another postcard view (Figure 10), is clearly contemporaneous with Figure 9, as it includes the same iron fence, and shows the other side of Turkey Foot Rock, which, except for displaying more of the rock due to excavation, is very similar to the original photograph showing the rock along the split rail fence (Figure 7). The broad concavity exaggerated by Lossing is only slightly visible but the prominent protuberance with central depression along the lower edge of the rock is quite distinct. Together, these views (as well as others not included here) clearly document the fact

that the rock, as currently resting in the Fallen Timbers memorial, has been turned upside down.

The explanation for the differences between these early postcard views and the earlier photographs in Van Tassel, is believed to involve an 1899 incident in which history enthusiasts from the city of Toledo attempted to appropriate the rock for the Ohio Centennial planned for 1903. Wanting to display it in Toledo, a group absconded with the rock but then abandoned it. A group of Maumee residents brought the rock back on a wagon and there was a suitable jollification (Fig. 11). Keller (1952) provides details of this incident, as does Wendler (1988: 321-322). The postcards dating ca. 1905-1915 clearly show the rock after its return to the site along the river. The view in Figure 10 shows a smooth outline of the top of the rock very similar to that shown in the old view along the rail fence, while the base is very irregular, with the prominent, "dimpled" protuberance. Another photograph in Smith (1924: 154) confirms these aspects of the rock. These views are important in establishing that following the abortive removal to Toledo the rock was replaced in essentially its original position, though not quite the original orientation – but still right side up. Daniel F. Cook, the land owner, donated a small plot of land for the rock, a Turkey Foot Monumental Association was formed, and an elaborate iron fence erected. Much more of the rock is visible in these postcard views, presumably because the pictures were taken shortly after the 1899 removal and replacement of the rock.

Further evidence that the rock was replaced right side up following its 1899 excursion is shown in Figure 12, an 1892 view from a glass plate negative. At the top left of the rock is the rounded, pillow-like layer now lying at the bottom of the rock at Fallen Timbers memorial. Compare this view with Figures 1, 5, 8, and 9.

### Subsequent History: The Rock Turned Upside Down

As early as 1916 it was recommended that the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society acquire the site of Fort Meigs and Turkey Foot Rock (Committee on Fort Miami and Fort Meigs 1916: 107-108). In 1921 the site of the Fallen Timbers memorial was donated to the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society by Clarissa Cook Moore (daughter of Daniel F. Cook), and the monument was dedicated in 1929 (*Museum Echoes* 2(4): 25-26. It was late 1931, however, before the Maumee Valley Pioneer and Historical Society of Toledo deeded Turkey Foot Rock to the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society (McPherson 1932: 47; Columbus *Ohio State Journal* 21 Nov 1931, p. 2). Although McPherson mistakenly thought the carvings were prehistoric, the historic nature of the carvings was clarified in a 1934 letter from Walter J. Sherman, chairman of the Fallen Timbers Committee of the His-

torical Society of Northwestern Ohio, to Dr. Emerson F. Greenman of the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society. (Cited in the 1950 report by the Anthony Wayne Parkway Board, this letter has not been found in the Ohio Historical Society's Archives Library or in the Archaeological Dept. county files.)

The files of the Anthony Wayne Parkway Board, now housed in the State Archives at The Ohio Historical Society, contain several photographs that shed light on the rock's later history. Comparison of these photographs (as well as earlier photographs) with the rock as it appears today leaves no doubt that at some point the rock was turned upside down and remains upside down today. Why or how this happened remains a mystery, whether by accident or design; but there is no question that it is so. Figure 13 shows the rock in its normal position, apparently on a somewhat eroded rectangular concrete or stone base, in front of the iron fence erected when the land owner (Daniel F. Cook) donated the site to the Turkey Foot Rock Monumental Association (Keller 1952: 195). The aluminum alloy ("sewahely") and concrete sign is one of a series of 35 markers manufactured by the Sewah Studios of Marietta and erected by the Ohio Dept. of Highways for the Ohio Revolutionary Memorial Commission (founded in 1929) in 1930 and 1931 (Van Tassel 1931). Correspondence files of the Commission are preserved at the Ohio Historical Society and indicate that the Lucas County signs were part of a second set delivered to the Dept. of Highways in January or February of 1931 (letter, A.D. Hosterman to W.J. Sherman January 21, 1931). The sign must have been vandalized almost immediately, for E.M. Hawes, proprietor of Sewah Studios wrote to Hosterman May 27, 1931, stating that the sign was being repaired and would be returned promptly. W.J. Sherman wrote Hosterman July 15, 1931, that the sign had been replaced and "appeared to be all right now, or until the small boy gets in his work on the filigree..." The significance of this photograph lies in the fact that it confirms the rock was still oriented right side up as late as the spring of 1931. Note that the three tracks incised on the lower part of the stone are clearly visible. Also noticeable is the faint, broad depression along the top of the side to the right and the irregular nature of the lower portion of that side, conforming well with the old postcard view shown in Figure 10. The condition of the two painted concrete posts suggests that this photograph may well date considerably after the marker was erected in 1931.

Another photograph, included in the Anthony Wayne Parkway Board's 1950 *Program for Developing the Site of the Battle of Fallen Timbers* (Figure 14) shows the rock ca. 1946-1950 and documents landscaping and other changes made by the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society. This photograph is important in that it can be narrowly dated, due to the partial

view of the rear of a Chrysler Corporation auto manufactured ca. 1946-1949 (Dan Clements, Columbus, Ohio, pers. comm.) and must date no later than 1950 since it appears in the Parkway Board's 1950 report. The Maumee River and old Route 24 can clearly be seen in the background, so the view dates prior to the rock being moved to its present location on the Fallen Timbers bluff. Comparison with Figures 2, 7 and 10 leaves no doubt that the rock is now upside down, in particular, the irregular, "knobby" portion of the side shown at the base of the rock in Figures 7, 10, and 13, is now at the top in Figure 14.

If any further evidence is needed, there is another view of Turkey Foot Rock at this location, surrounded by the same distinctive chain fence draped from a series of iron pipes (Fig. 15). This photo, too, is in the Anthony Wayne Parkway Board state archives housed at The Ohio Historical Society. As can be seen, particularly by comparing this view with the Van Tassel photograph (Fig. 8) and Figure 9 the bulk of the rock now lies above the prominent diagonal bedding plane rather than below it. Perhaps even more conclusive, the faintly incised letter "N" lies just above the bedding plane in the Van Tassel photo and can now be seen below it in Figure 15. This photograph is also useful in supporting a remark made by Randolph C. Downes (1965: 48) that is well worth quoting:

*"[The rock's] unguarded exposure for over sixty years has caused erosion and intrusive marks that prevent definite observation. Turkey-foot marks are to be seen, but they have obviously been tampered with."*

Figure 15 shows that at least two of the bird tracks have been highlighted by later scratching, although subsequent weathering has largely erased these recent scratches (as well as the earlier "N"). Downes' observation may have been the result of a September, 1952, visit to the rock, accompanied by Mrs. Margarette E. Pryor, "an expert in Indian pictographs from the Detroit Aborigine Society" and others (Reynders 1952: 14). Mrs. Pryor concluded that the Indians "must have believed that the boulder housed the spirit of the Turkey god who ranked high in their religion as the one who brought fire from the heaven to their people."

### Why and When Did It Happen?

It would be helpful to know why Turkey Track Rock was turned upside down but the limited amount of publicly accessible documentation from the Ohio Historical Society's former Property Division offers no clues. One theory is that it was thought simply to look better in the newly landscaped grounds (Fig. 16). This might be termed the aesthetic theory. It is also possible that the rock was deliberately re-oriented upside down in a mistaken attempt to make it agree more in superficial appearance with that shown in the old, original photograph (Fig. 7); quite possibly it was

incorrectly thought that the rock had been replaced upside down in 1899 and that this error was being corrected. This hypothesis might be called the historical theory. Finally, the “flip” may have been performed accidentally by workmen who did not notice what they were doing or thought that it did not make any difference. This might be dubbed the Laurel and Hardy theory.

As to when the “flip” occurred, several lines of evidence suggest that it may have been as early as 1940. Very probably it was part of the landscaping and “improvement” associated with the pipe and chain fence, and the earliest reference to this chain occurs in a “Maumee Valley Travel Tour” prepared by the Toledo Automobile Club in 1940, which simply states “The rock enclosed by a chain on your right, is supposedly the rock on which Chief Turkey Foot stood and exhorted his men to oppose General Anthony Wayne...” (Anonymous 1941: 93). This tour was developed for the Maumee Valley International Historical Convention, held September 27-29, 1940 (“International” by virtue of one speaker coming from Ontario.) It seems very probable that the rock and its environs were “gussied up” for this occasion, the proceedings of which were printed in *The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*; however, it could have occurred earlier, at any time after the rock was deeded to the Society in 1931.

It is worth noting that the 1940 Maumee Valley convention resulted in the formation of the Anthony Wayne Memorial Association, which eventually led to the development of the Anthony Wayne Parkway Board, which in turn led to Turkey Foot Rock being moved to its present location in 1953.

### Conclusion: Does It Matter?

The fact that no one else appears to have noticed or commented on the fact that Turkey Foot Rock was turned upside down some sixty to seventy years ago suggests that it does not make much difference to anyone today. Inquiring of the Toledo MetroParks, when the idea was first suggested, the only response was “I wouldn’t be a bit surprised,” and no further information has been forthcoming from that agency. An inquiry of a member of the Tri-Regional Indian Organization (TRIO) of

Ohio has not been answered, nor has one to the Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma, a group including the descendants of the Ottawa who lived in northwestern Ohio both prior to and after the Battle of Fallen Timbers. Vergil Noble of the National Park Service has pointed out that National Historic Landmark site integrity refers to the condition of the site at the time it is designated, so that earlier impact, including the “flipping” of Turkey Foot Rock, is irrelevant to the site’s National Landmark status. Noble (pers. comm. September 4, 2007) has also observed that the National Historic Landmark nomination form for the Fallen Timbers Memorial has never been revised to incorporate the actual battlefield site delineated by Pratt (2003).

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Figure 1. Turkey Foot Rock as it appears today. The East side, showing prominent horizontal bands, including rounded, pillow-like band to the right of the plaque.



Figure 2. Turkey Foot Rock today. The West side, viewed from above. Note irregular weathered upper edge along the nearer (western) side, the broad concavity below and especially the prominent protuberance with central depression.



Figure 3. Turkey Foot Rock today. The South side. Note prominent diagonal bedding plane. One track faintly visible on lower portion, pointing up and another on the upper portion, pointing down.



Figure 4. Close-up of South side of Turkey Foot Rock today showing one carving; another, originally to the right of it, appears to have been broken off.



Figure 5. Turkey Foot Rock today. Photo deliberately inverted for comparison with Figures 8 and 9. Traces of two (of three) incised tracks are visible on the larger portion of the rock.



Figure 6. Drawing of Turkey Foot Rock from Benson Lossing (1860). Note Maumee River on the left and Presque Isle Hill in the background.



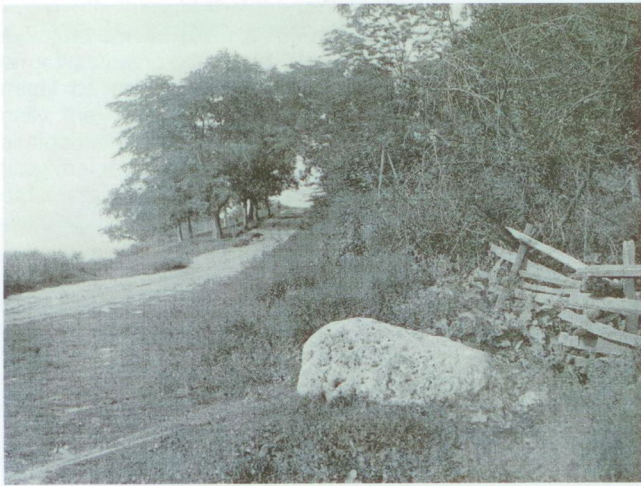


Figure 7. Best known photograph of Turkey Foot Rock, ca. 1880, showing road up Presque Isle Hill and rail snake fence. Maumee River beyond the road on left. (From Van Tassel (1901)). Although not visible, the carvings are on the side facing the road and river to the southeast. Note the bulbous protuberance with central depression along the lower edge of the rock.

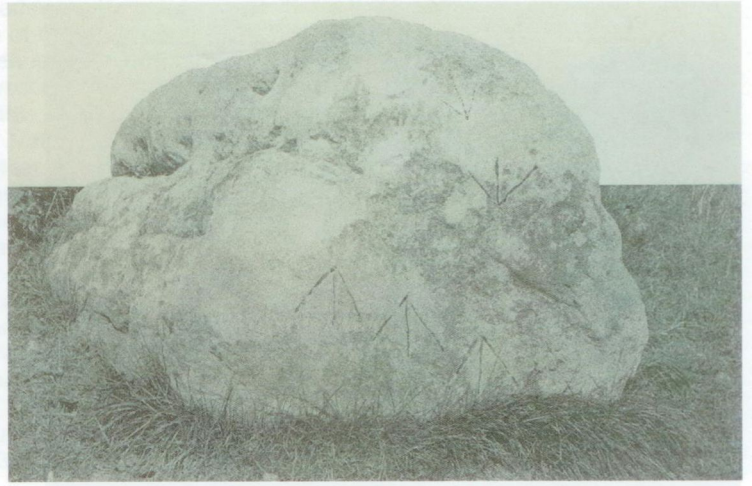


Figure 8. Turkey Foot Rock from Van Tassel (1901). Note three tracks on the larger portion of the rock, below the diagonal bedding plane, and two above. A faint "...ON" carving can also be seen above the bedding plane.

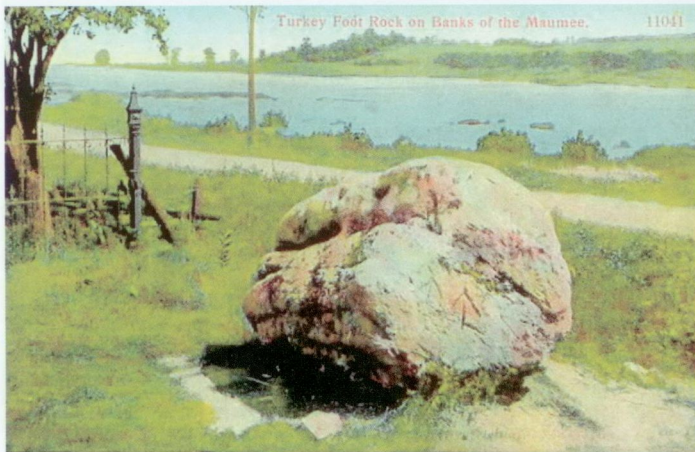


Figure 9. View showing the Maumee River in the background. The "south" face with the carvings is now facing west, and much more of the base of the rock is exposed.



Figure 10. View of Turkey Foot Rock restored to its site along the Maumee River Road. The carvings are on the side to the left, facing west in this view. Note the recent ground disturbance.



Figure 11. The "Jollification" on Return of Turkey Foot Rock to Maumee. From Gunckel (1913).



Figure 12. Turkey Foot Rock looking southeast (downstream) in 1892. Note the rounded, pillow-like layer on the top edge of the rock. Photo (Object ID 10857) courtesy of Toledo Lucas County Public Library.





Figure 13. Turkey Foot Rock from Van Tassel (1901). Note three tracks on the larger portion of the rock, below the diagonal bedding plane, and two above. A faint "... ON" carving can also be seen above the bedding plane.

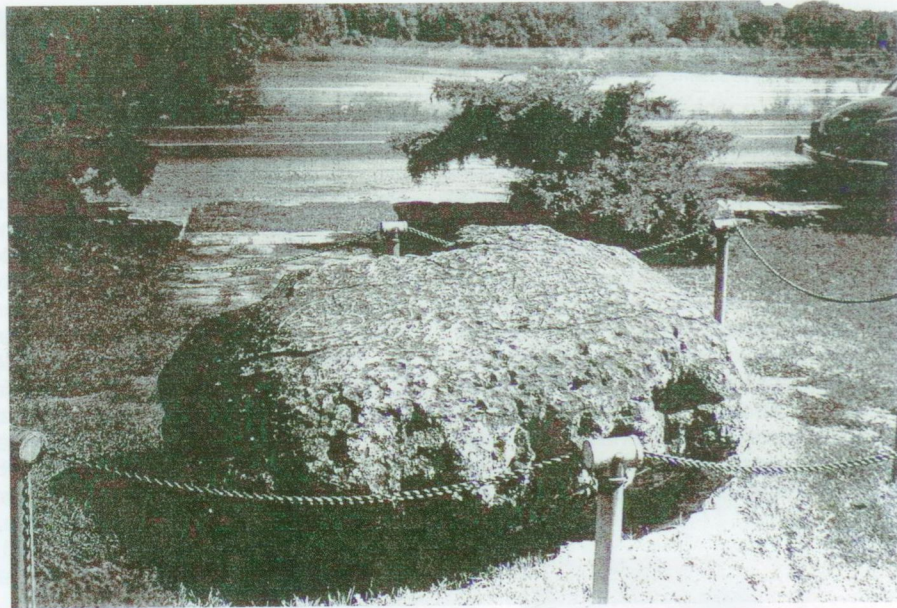


Figure 14. Turkey Foot Rock upside down, ca. 1946-1950. Maumee River and old Route 24 in background. From Anthony Wayne Parkway Board 1950 Program. (Photo purchased from the Ohio Historical Society.)

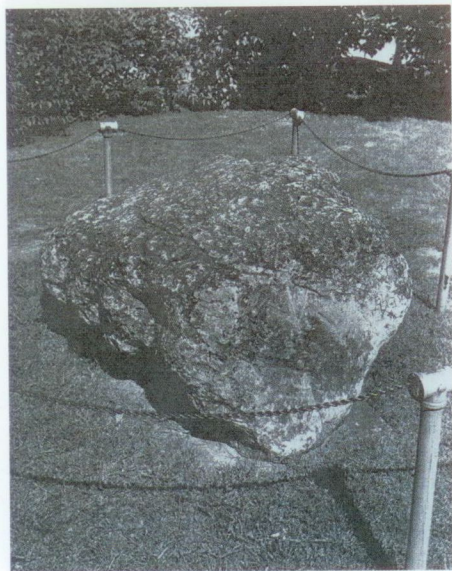


Figure 15. Turkey Foot Rock upside down, ca. 1946-1950. Anthony Wayne Parkway Board archives. (Photo purchased from The Ohio Historical Society.)

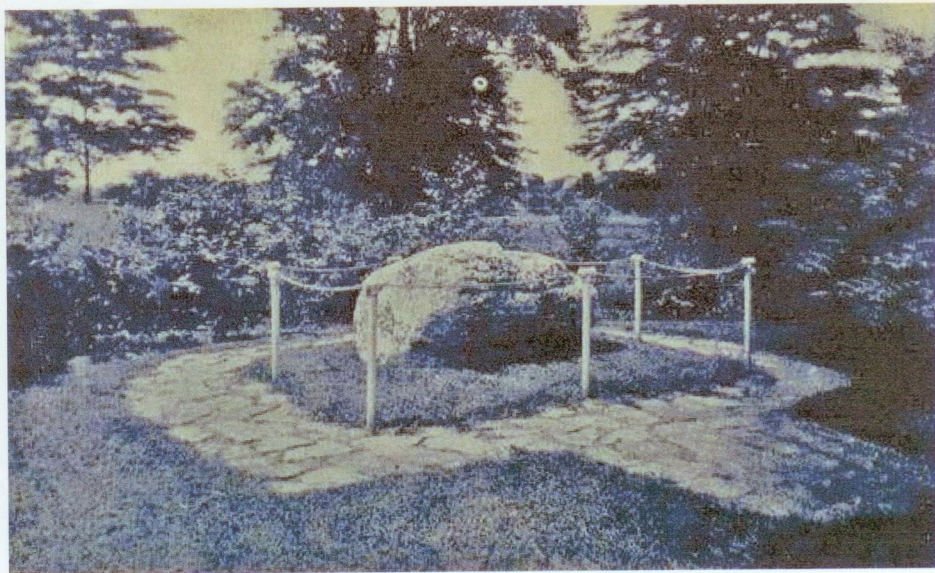


Figure 16. Turkey Foot Rock at the old location along the Maumee River. Undated postcard believed to be ca. 1931-1940. Note chain fence. Rock has been turned upside-down.